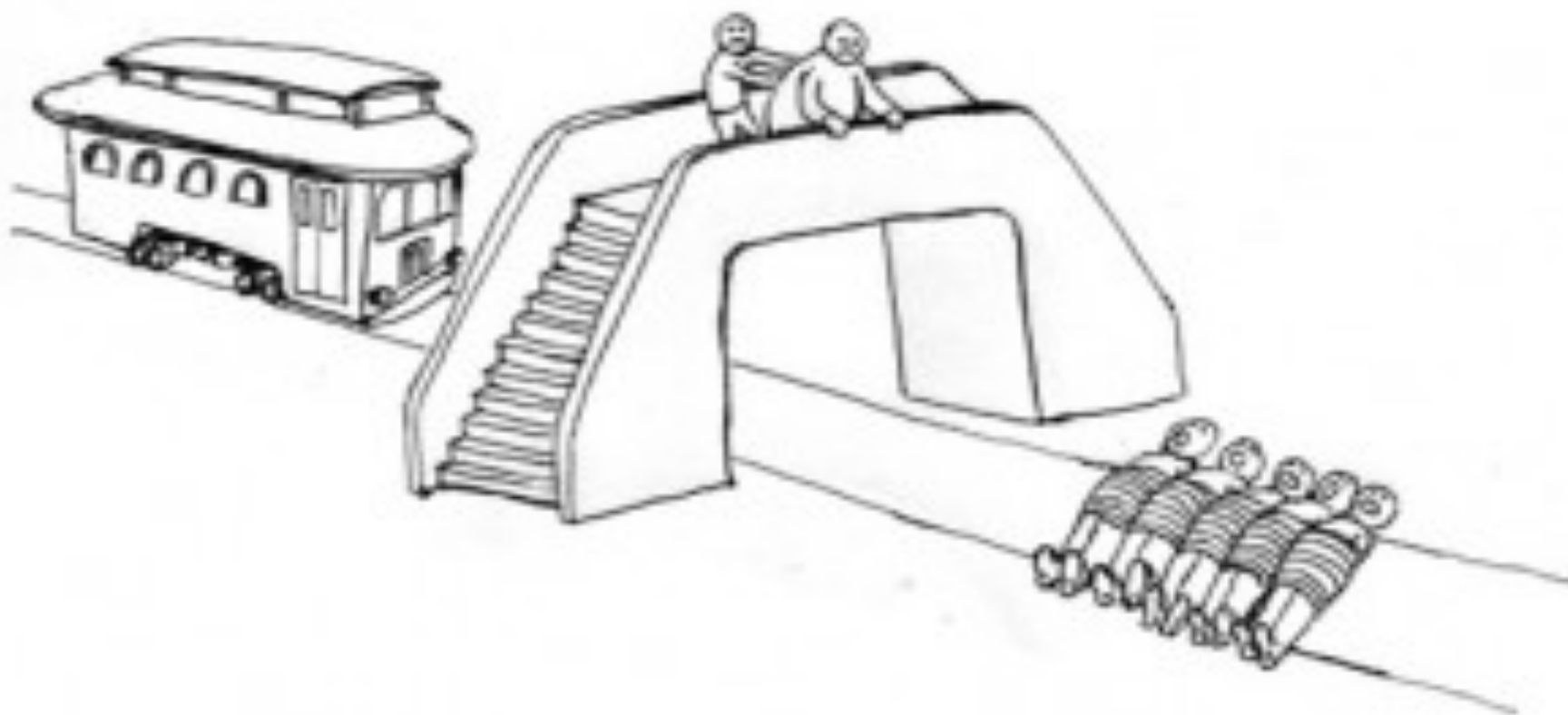


Ought you pull?



Ought you push?



Ought you mine?

Hedonic Act Utilitarianism

Statement of Hedonic Act Utilitarianism

Hedonic Act Utilitarianism (HAU): An action is right just in case that action maximizes hedonic utility.

What is hedonic utility?

Actions have consequences. Some of these consequences might include pleasure. Other consequences might include pain. The hedonic utility of an action is the result of subtracting the total amount of pain that is a consequence of the action from the total amount of pleasure that is a consequence of that action.

Ex: Suppose you eat a slice of pizza. Suppose you get some pleasure from eating it, say 5 units of pleasure. But suppose you get food poisoning and suffer 10 units of pain. The hedonic utility of eating the slice of pizza is -5.

What is maximizing?

An action maximizes hedonic utility just in case no alternative to that action has a higher hedonic utility.

Ex: Go back to the case where you ate a slice of pizza. Suppose you could have eaten some pasta instead. Suppose you would have only gotten 4 units of pleasure from eating the pasta. But you wouldn't have gotten food poisoning. So the hedonic utility of eating the pasta would have been 4. If these were your only two options, then eating pasta would maximize hedonic utility.

A1: Get drunk.

10 units of pleasure from tonight

20 units of pain from failing tomorrow's exam

$HU = -10$

A2: Study for the exam.

5 units of pain from boring studying

10 units of pleasure from getting an A on the exam

$HU = 5$

What do people find attractive about a moral theory like this?

Makes Morality Less Mysterious

Helps Make Moral Decisions

Explains Our Intuitions About Some Cases

The Argument from Unjust Pleasures

You are an emperor. You own a coliseum. There is a crowd of 10,000 people. There is one gladiator. If you release the lions, they will kill and eat the gladiator. He will suffer 1,000 units of pain. Each member of the crowd will enjoy 1 unit of pleasure.

- (1) If HAU is true, then you are obligated to release the lions.
- (2) But you are not obligated to release the lions.
- (3) So, HAU is not true.

The Argument from Worthless Pleasures

- (1) If HAU is true, you are obligated to let Porky into the pig pen.
- (2) But you are not obligated to let Porky into the pig pen.
- (3) So, HAU is not true.

The Experience Machine Argument

- (1) If HAU is true, then you are obligated to put Bob in the experience machine.
- (2) But you are not obligated to put Bob in the experience machine.
- (3) So, HAU is not true.

The Organ Harvest Argument

If HAU is true, then you are morally obligated to harvest the organs of the healthy person.

But you are not obligated to harvest the organs of the healthy person.

So, HAU isn't true.

The Movie Argument

If HAU is true, then it would be wrong for you to watch the Tonight Show.

But it wouldn't be wrong for you to watch the Tonight Show.

So HAU isn't true.

The Argument from Bad Descendents

If HAU is true, then it was wrong for the couple to conceive a child on their wedding day.
But it wasn't wrong for the couple to conceive a child on their wedding day.
So, HAU is false.

The Nearest and Dearest Argument

If HAU is true, then it would be wrong for you to save your son.

But it wouldn't be wrong for you to do that.

So HAU isn't true.

The Argument from Moral Knowledge

If HAU is true, then we don't know which actions are right and which actions are wrong.

But we do know which actions are right and which actions are wrong.

So, HAU isn't true.

Motivation for (2): It seems like we know that some actions are right and some actions are wrong. It doesn't seem wrong for me to step on this spot on the floor. It seems like it would be wrong for me to torture babies.

Motivation for (1): We don't know what our options are and we don't know what the consequences of those options will be.